

Minutes of EAST LYME BOARD OF SELECTMEN SPECIAL BUDGET REVIEW MEETING - 02/13/23

Date and time: 02/13/23 6:30 PM to: 02/13/23 7:30 PM

Present: Brooke Stevens, Recording Secretary, BOS Members Present:, Kevin Seery, First Selectman, Dan Cunningham, Bill Weber, Anne Santoro, Rose Ann Hardy, Absent:, Ann Cicchiello

CC: Also Present: , Kevin Gervais, Finance Director, Bill Bundy, Fire Marshal, John MacDonald, Niantic Fire Chief, Chris Taylor, Flanders Fire Chief, Julie Wilson, Deputy Director of Public Safety, Lt. Michael Macek, Lt. Dana Jezierski

Location: EAST LYME TOWN HALL UPPER MEETING ROOM

Link: <https://app.meetingking.com/meetings/392995>

Topics

1. Call Meeting to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Note First Selectman Seery called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and led the Pledge.

Note Mr. Seery noted that Ms. Cicchiello is not an attendance; she is Ex-Officio for the Board of Education and they're doing their budget review tonight, which is going to be quite involved, so they thought it would be important for her to attend that meeting instead.

Note Mr. Seery said the Police Chief was unable to attend the meeting tonight as well, so they're going to reschedule the review of the Police budget- Dept 216, for February 22nd, 2023.

2. Review Budgets

2-1. 224- Fire Marshal

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Note Fire Marshal Bundy came forward to review his budget and said some of the following: This year's proposed budget reflects similar line items from the last several years, but with the addition of a new line item, to create a position for a full time Deputy Fire Marshal. Currently the department consists of a full-time Fire Marshal and one part-time Deputy Fire Marshal. When he took over in May of last year, there was no Administrative Assistant. He researched back to 2017, and the department was staffed with a full-time Fire Marshal, a full-time Deputy and a full-time Administrative Assistant. Over the years although the budget has diminished in that respect, some of the responsibilities were reallocated to other departments, which included the reduction of staffing. Unfortunately, some of our statutory requirements are still there, in terms of inspections, pre-planned reviews and investigations. There are between 700 - 800 properties within the town that require some sort of inspection on either an annual, biannual, or every three years, in addition to all the plan reviews. Current staffing is not sufficient. In this January alone, approximately 15 inspections were required and the majority of them were not inspected. The need for staffing is to be able to maintain our requirement to inspect these properties. The Admin currently works 24 hours and he would like to increase that to 28 hours, so that he has 5 days coverage within the office. The training operational has been upped from \$5,000 to \$10,000 in anticipation of a full-time Deputy. They're mandated to complete training to maintain their certifications every three years.

Note Mr. Bundy further discussed the proposed budget and summarized the draft ordinance for a fee structure, which will be going before the Board of Selectmen for consideration, in a couple of days; East Lyme is one of the only towns in the area that doesn't charge for inspection and fire plan review services. He anticipates an estimated revenue of \$75,000, which will offset the budgetary increases he is requesting.

Note Ms. Hardy asked what the projected revenue is based on, and Mr. Bundy explained that the fee structure that he proposed is based on language that is recommended by the State Fire Marshal, and this same fee structure has been adopted by surrounding towns, and it's all based on square footage, which he further detailed.

Note Mr. Seery noted the previous Fire Marshal did not have an Admin, he chose to use one of his Deputies as the Admin, and that person left when that Fire Marshal left.

Note Ms. Hardy asked about the telephone expenses for his office and Mr. Bundy replied that it's a comparative rate; both he and the Deputy have cell phones, and that's in addition to the office phone.

2-2. 217- Niantic Fire Department

Note Chief MacDonald came forward to discuss his proposed budget and noted some of the following: Most of the budget hasn't changed. Training and fire prevention is going up from \$5,000 to \$6,000. The reason for that is Firefighter 1 courses are increasing from \$800 - \$900 to \$1,250. Firefighter 2 courses are up to \$950. They originally requested two additional firefighters, but Mr. Seery reduced this number to one. Everything else in the budget pretty much remained the same.

Note Mr. Weber asked why they have an increase in overtime if they're adding an additional full-time person?

Note Mr. MacDonald replied that contractually the firefighters work a nine-hour day, and the last hour of the shift is overtime; they get automatically built into their salary five hours of overtime every week, as well as extra hours for filling in when needed.

Note Mr. Weber observed the need to fill in for vacations and things of that nature is nothing new, and Mr. MacDonald added that the 2.75% increases this year also contribute to a higher overtime calculation.

Note Mr. Seery briefly detailed how it has become increasingly difficult to fill part-time positions and this often necessitates that the needed coverage be filled by full-time firemen, and results in greater overtime costs. He added that they're hoping to have a meeting with a group that involves the Ambulance Association, the full-time professionals, the Chiefs, and Fire Marshal, to look at a more cost effective and efficient way of doing things.

Note Mr. Weber and Mr. Seery further discussed overtime and Mr. Seery explained that the addition of a new firefighter is merely meeting the suggested staffing, instead of one firefighter at Station 2 by Rocky Neck, there will be two firefighters, which is recommended.

Note Mr. Gervais detailed the overtime calculations for the Selectmen.

Note Ms. Santoro asked Mr. MacDonald to elaborate on the rationale for an additional firefighter. and Mr. MacDonald discussed the severe decrease in volunteers and the decrease in part-timers. He added that they're trying to put them on a full-time schedule, to work through the whole week-Sunday through Saturday, and to accomplish that, at minimum, an additional firefighter is needed.

Note Ms. Santoro asked if they've seen an increase in calls and Mr. MacDonald replied that as of July, Niantic Fire Department alone has answered 1,513 calls.

Note Mr. MacDonald briefly detailed how the Niantic Fire Department has become increasingly busier over the years.

Note Mr. Seery discussed the importance of having sufficient resources and Mr. MacDonald said if you look at the demographics in Town, and the addition of apartment buildings and condos like Rocky Neck Village, Village Crossing, Freedom Way, and the like, the calls will only continue to increase.

Note Mr. MacDonald further discussed volunteers and explained how the training has changed since he started; it takes about six or eight months for someone to get through the firefighter one course alone, it's a long commitment, the course only has a 69% pass rate, and completion is necessary before they can even go inside the building.

Note Mr. MacDonald discussed how vehicle maintenance is always a costly concern.

Note Ms. Hardy thanked Mr. MacDonald for stepping up and taking over for Chief Barone.

2-3. 218- Flanders Fire Department

Note Chief Taylor came forward to discuss his proposed budget and said some of the following: This year's 2.75% step with both normal hours and overtime, makes up the majority of his budget. His vehicle maintenance budget is virtually the same.

One of the problems he's having with the newer vehicles is computers.

He would love to have a 29-year-old truck like Chief MacDonald, there's no computers and they work better.

During the last few years, a good portion of their maintenance budget has been spent on computers alone, which frequently become outdated.

They also become filled with things like road grime.

They have a lot of problems with antennas and items of that nature in the north end of town, due to low hanging wires and trees.

As far as building maintenance, they try to maintain the buildings the best they can themselves and through their personal membership.

Over the last two years, they've probably invested about \$15- \$20,000 of their own money into the bill.

The cost for the required fire training courses have gone up tremendously, and he and Chief MacDonald work together to ensure that everyone receives the training they need.

The budget for telephones has remained the same.

Task Mr. Taylor said in terms of fuel, they pay out of pocket, and each year First Selectman Seery writes a letter to the Ambulance Association, and in turn, they get money back on fuel. Mr. Seery said he will draft this year's letter to the Ambulance Association.

Owned by Kevin Seery, First Selectman

Note Mr. Taylor discussed how uniforms for firemen are very expensive. He added that there has been very little increase in their capital items, and they're grateful that the Ambulance Association steps up and pays for a great deal of what they need.

Note Ms. Hardy asked if he knows how many emergency calls they've answered this year, and Mr. Taylor replied that they do about 85% of what NFD does; the busiest section in town has always been from Bridebrook Rehab to Crescent Point.

Note Mr. Taylor said they just purchased a fourth ambulance since they're so busy, and Mr. Seery noted that both Montville and Waterford have helped us out by loaning out ambulances; one of our ambulances was hit while another was down for maintenance.

Note Ms. Santoro asked how Mr. Taylor is feeling about the vehicle maintenance reduction from \$21,500 to \$19,000. Mr. Taylor said it will be tough, but they're going to do their best to work within those parameters. He's hoping that money will see them through any unforeseen circumstances despite rising prices of parts and materials.

Note Ms. Santoro and Mr. Taylor discussed how they utilize town mechanics whenever possible for small repairs, but not for anything major or elaborate having to do with the engines and pumps.

Note Mr. Cunningham said he's not clear on how a call is responded to and would love a presentation explaining what's involved, and Mr. Taylor said he would be happy to provide that for them.

Note Mr. Seery said they really want to look at what conditions and practices will enhance the fire departments, and there's unanimous agreement that we need a full-time, paid, in control, Fire Chief.

2-4. 226- Animal Control

Note Lt. Macek came forward to discuss the proposed ACO budget and shared some of the following:
There's an increase within the ACO 211 salary line.
The part-time Assistant ACO was made full-time, so the part-time assistant funds got absorbed up into the salary line.
Animal Control funding is split 50/50 with Waterford.
So, 50% of whatever the expenditure is for that fiscal year does get doled out to the town.
There is a small increase in overtime due to the way their schedules are, they are both full-time and are both covering the town for the complete seven days of a week.
We do have to pay them for after hour calls.
In 2022 alone they had 99 after hours calls alone.
That equals out to about 1.9 calls per week.
They get a minimum of two hours pay to allow for coming from home, responding to the call, going to the shelter, if need be, and then returning home.
The little bit of increase is to offset that and that's separated between both towns.

Note Lt. Macek briefly detailed the particulars of how the expenses are divided between both towns and further reviewed the budget.

Note Ms. Hardy asked if the calls are only for domestic animals and Lt. Macek said domestic and some wild animals as well.

Note Ms. Hardy said coyotes are still a major problem and it was her understanding that only state officials could deal with them. Lt. Macek said that's correct, but the ACO will respond to basically anything else such as skunks, raccoons, seagulls, and deer.

Note Ms. Hardy said a local resident called her a few days ago and said she didn't dare go out of her house because three coyotes were sitting on her front porch.

Note Lt. Macek said if she's scared to come out of the house and if they're not available, or they don't give them some kind of direction, they can at least go out there and scare them away. He added that they have Officers on the road, who do have some tools on them they can use as well as the ACO, whether it happens to be pepper spray or just a loud noise to scare them away since they tend to react like nervous dogs.

2-5. 214- Emergency Management

Note Julie Wilson, Deputy Director of Public Safety, came forward to present her proposed budget and said some of the following:

They have a couple of standard increases.

They're requesting 2% cola for the Communications Officer and Radiological Officer who get a monthly stipend.

In terms of building maintenance, the actual department has figured them into their budget, so they would like to put those funds into an emergency resource fund based upon the current climate.

If something's happening, and we have a large event around the corner, and there's a concern about a copycat, they'll have those funds to use for resources for additional protection measures.

They did use additional resources last year at Celebrate East Lyme, given the events that occurred in Chicago.

It's just an extra security measure.

By combining the telephone services in the building, they have seen a \$3,000 annual reduction.

There's a small bump up for regular annual monthly membership fees for training.

They've requested the same transportation allowance.

She has done a lot of traveling across the state this year for trainings for emergency management, and that's definitely something that they would like to keep in place.

Note Ms. Hardy asked about the large increase in miscellaneous supplies in 2022 and Ms. Wilson said the following:

The increase was due to the cost of the Everbridge Emergency Notification Program.

This year they're adding an additional \$5,200 which is the annual cost for the VOC Emergency Management Software Program.

That's something that was paid for through ARPA funds.

They have received \$12,497 from the ARPA funds.

They purchased that program which included training for two admins, one of which is herself.

They've selected one of their dispatchers to go through that training as well.

His hours over and above his position need to be paid for, for him to take those trainings.

The software will provide big dividends in the areas of efficiency in the town.

Note Mr. Weber said it's good to see that building maintenance went down to zero, but then this emergency resource fund is to pay for essential emergency services, and we already pay for essential emergencies; it seems like a very generic category.

Note Ms. Wilson said it's for security for community events. She said after "this" happened in Chicago, they enlisted the services of outside police, who had drones, which they utilized to survey the entire event area. Ms. Wilson added that they try to think outside the box, and if it means spending \$1,300 for the safety and security of our community, then it's money well spent.

Note Lt. Macek led a brief general discussion about what costs fall under the Emergency Management Umbrella as opposed to the Police Department Umbrella.

2-6. 215- Dispatch

Note Lt. Jezierski came forward to present the proposed Dispatch budget and noted some of the following: There are two increases with the dispatcher's budget.

One is dispatcher salary, which is the contractual raises for eight full-time dispatchers.

The second one is for training payroll, which they bumped up from \$6,000 to \$7,000.

This covers mandatory training that all of our dispatchers are required to complete.

In addition to the full-time dispatchers, they have six part-time dispatchers.

Note Mr. Weber asked about the overtime and Lt. Jezierski said the problem with overtime is that part-timers have two shifts per week, every week, and historically they have been unreliable and there's no mechanism to make that work. She added that it's hard to get part-timers to take those shifts, so it needs to be filled with full-timers; they have to have a body in that seat.

2-7. 216- Police

Note Mr. Seery reminded everyone that the Police Department budget will be heard on February 22nd, 2023.

3. Adjournment

Decision MOTION (1)

Ms. Santoro moved to adjourn the Board of Selectmen February 13th, 2023, Special Budget Review Meeting at 7:42 p.m.

Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 5-0-0.

Note Respectfully submitted,
Brooke Stevens, Recording Secretary

Task Summary

New Tasks

Task Mr. Taylor said in terms of fuel, they pay out of pocket, and each year First Selectman Seery writes a letter to the Ambulance Association, and in turn, they get money back on fuel. Mr. Seery said he will draft this year's letter to the Ambulance Association.

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